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All political conflicts have losers and winners, and those which have embroiled China since the death of Mao Tse-tung do not seem to be exceptions.

Mao's widow, Chiang Ch'ing, and her close associates from Shanghai, are most conspicuous among the vanquished. Hua Kuo-feng's accession to the chairmanship of the Chinese Communist Party qualifies him as a principal victor. No less a winner, however, is the leadership of China's armed forces.

Since Mao's death on Sept. 9, the top commanders of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have assumed their most active and visible presence in national politics in close to a decade. The critical responsibilities assumed and executed by military units in aiding the victims of the Tangshan earthquake of late July contributed substantially to the Army's growing prestige.

But the PLA's apparent role in the succession struggle of early October dramatically confirmed this status. It is widely assumed that support for Hua Kuo-feng from key military figures was instrumental in Chiang Ch'ing's ouster. As a result, senior officers have moved even closer to center stage in Chinese politics.

Of the eleven full members of the Central Committee Politburo present at the Oct. 24 rally celebrating Hua's appointment as chairman, seven — including Hua himself — appeared in the olive green uniform of the PLA. (A twelfth surviving member, the aged military strategist Liu Po-ch'eng, did not attend.)

But while the military leaders have unquestionably enhanced their leadership position, the larger implications for Chinese politics remain unsettled.

If any issue proves pivotal in the coming months, resource allocation seems the most likely candidate, with the PLA very much involved in the decision process. Heightened attention to economic goals has been readily apparent in recent weeks. Chou En-lai's January 1975 call for "the comprehensive modernization of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology ... before the end of the century" is again quoted approving-

Chinese radicals loss has been Army's gain

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ly in the Chinese press. No matter how grand this vision, however, it leaves undetermined the difficult and potentially divisive choices which such a policy commitment requires.

Defense needs have long been a principal claimant of Chinese resources. Steadily if unobtrusively over the past decade, the People's Republic has become one of the world's leading military powers.

Twice in a three-week period during late September and early October, Chinese scientists conducted successful nuclear weapons tests — the nineteenth and twentieth such explosions. And on November 17, Peking's largest explosion ever — a four-megaton hydrogen bomb — was detonated in northwest China. According to recent estimates, China's weapons stockpile now approaches 300 nuclear and thermonuclear warheads.

Close to 100 intermediate bombers and missiles, with ranges up to 2000 miles, are scattered in various locations, principally in northern China. Even larger numbers of medium-range delivery vehicles are also deployed. Most significantly, research and development of more advanced weapons systems continues to progress, including both intercontinental and sea-launched ballistic missiles.

The enhancement of Chinese military strength has not been confined to nuclear weaponry. China's Navy has tripled the size of its submarine fleet since the early 1960s to nearly sixty vessels, thus becoming the world's third largest naval power. Close to 4000 jet fighters are presently in service in the PLA Air Force, with an additional 500 combat aircraft attached to the Navy's air arm. And China's land army of three million dwarfs that of any nation.

Yet numbers can obscure as well,

as reveal. In qualitative terms, China's weaponry lags well behind equivalent Soviet and American military hardware.

As US Director of Central Intelligence George Bush noted in recent Congressional testimony, China's military "mirrors the economy that supports it." While China has an abundant labor supply, the pool of advanced scientific and engineering manpower remains very limited.

Pressing economic needs both in agriculture and basic industrial development have reduced further the capital funds and technology available for national defense. Military planners have therefore had to rely almost exclusively on Soviet-designed weapons transferred to China more than 15 years ago but now produced in Chinese factories.

Whether by necessity or design, China's military strategy and posture closely reflect these constraints. The development of an independent nuclear deterrent has been deemed solely for retaliatory purposes, with testing and deployment thus far confined to Chinese soil. China's naval and air forces continue to limit their role to the protection of China's territorial waters and air space, with no appreciable capability to project military power beyond the country's borders. Undiminished emphasis upon Mao's doctrine of people's war suggests that an invasion by ground forces remains a principal threat against which China must prepare seriously.

The PLA has also continued to devote substantial time and energies to broader societal responsibilities, most notably in assisting industrial and agricultural production and in maintaining public order when extreme circumstances require. The practical effect of these policies has been to limit se-

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